



**United States Department of the Interior
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
Fort Matanzas National Monument
8635 A1A South
St. Augustine, FL 32080**



**Monthly Resource Management Update
March, 2011**

Piping Plover Surveys

In February, park staff partnered with ornithologists from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and the National Audubon Society to conduct piping plover surveys at Fort Matanzas. The piping plover (*Charadrius melodus*) is listed as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), and its Recovery Plan calls for a multi-state census to be taken periodically in order to help quantify its range-wide population. This year four piping plovers were documented in the park. While four is not a huge number, it does represent a positive upward trend compared to previous years.

The piping plover originally faced huge population declines in the late 19th and early 20th centuries due to the millinery trade when they were excessively hunted so their feathers could be used to decorate ladies' hats. Following the passing of legislation in 1918 to protect migratory birds, their numbers increased until the end of World War II. Following the war, rampant coastal development took a huge toll on the undisturbed habitat required by the piping plover for forage and nesting.

They were listed as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act in 1986, a protection which has since helped their population numbers to increase. Still, fewer than 2,000 pairs are thought to currently make up the Atlantic flyway population. Biologists seek to help this species recover by conserving adequate breeding and wintering habitat, and by protecting eggs, chicks, and nesting birds from human-caused disturbance and direct mortality, including predation by feral and pet cats.

[NATURE NOTE: Adult piping plovers have yellow-orange legs, a black band across the forehead from eye to eye, and a black ring around the base of the neck. They are small, stocky, sandy-colored birds. When foraging, they tend to run in short starts and stops. They prefer open, sandy habitat on outer beaches to feed and nest. Florida is a wintering zone for the piping plover.]

Great Horned Owls

On or about February 4th, one egg, and then another, laid by the park's resident female great horned owl, hatched. The two owlets are growing up fast, supplied with a regular supply of meat from the male owl which does the majority of the hunting for the family. Stop by the park and see this unique sight for yourselves, as they should be flying by the end of March.